

WHAT IS THE VERDICT?

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A SERMON

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“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”

1 John 3:21.

CAREFULLY observe that this text is spoken to the people of God. It speaks to those who are called “beloved.” These are the people who are especially loved of God and of His people. It is a very sweet and endearing title, but it evidently in this case belongs only to those who are of the family of grace, these alone can remain uncondemned of their hearts, and live in confidence towards God. I want you to observe this, because there are different ways of addressing different people, and these ways are instructive. To those who are not yet numbered among the beloved, we preach the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a gospel intended for the sinful, and it talks to them of pardon bought with blood; it is a gospel intended for the ungodly and it speaks to them of the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby their ungodly hearts may be renewed. Its tale is altogether of grace and free favor, and the passing by of transgression, iniquity, and sin to all those who cast themselves believingly at Jesus’ feet. That is the voice of Scripture to those who as yet are not beloved. The hope is that the Lord will call them beloved who were not beloved, and that in the place where it was said, “They are not My people,” they shall be called the people of the living God. But when we come to speak to those who are saved, to those who are the beloved of God, we deal not with the pardon of criminals, but with the conduct of children. They are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, and therefore we do not so much urge them to saving faith as to the higher degree of boldness which grows out of faith, to that confidence towards God which is the right and privilege of the heirs of salvation. We want them not only to know that they have believed, but to be assured of it and to enjoy that holy familiarity with God, that blessed boldness towards God, that sweet joy and restfulness of spirit which are their privilege as the beloved of the Lord. These enjoyments may be had by them if they will be obedient to the directions of the Spirit of God, which are laid down by the beloved apostle in this epistle.

As soon as we become children we are freed from the condemning power of the law, we are not under the principle and motive of the law of works, but yet we are not without law unto Christ. We come under those sacred regulations which rule the household of God. We are dealt with not as mere subjects are ruled by a king, but as children are governed by a father. We come from under that law which was promulgated with thunder and lightning, and the sound of a trumpet waxing exceedingly loud and long, and we listen to the gentle voice of the man Christ Jesus. We come from under that law which did not permit even a beast to touch the mountain, but kept all Israel at a distance by boundaries set about the mountain, and we draw near with glad hearts unto the Lord. We come, I say, from under the law, and we feel the sway of love. “You are not under the law, but under grace,” and therefore, sin shall not have dominion over you. We have come into the family of God, and in that family there is a rule and discipline devised by love, and carried out with infinite compassion. Upon our obedience to that discipline our peace and prosperity depend. If we so live that our hearts condemn us not, then we have confidence towards God.

It appears from the text that this child-like confidence towards God originally arises out of a certain solemn trial of our case. There is to be a trial within the heart, or conscience, a trial in which every power of the inner nature is to take its part as prosecutor, witness, jury, or judge. Out of this trial comes the non-condemnation which gives birth to “confidence toward God.” At this time I shall bring before you, first, *the trial in the inward court of the heart*. Secondly, *the acquittal pronounced by this court*, “If our

heart condemn us not;" and thirdly, the result, *the confidence which comes of this acquittal*. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." May the Holy Spirit teach us while we think on these things!

I. I want you to think of THE TRIAL HELD IN THE INNER COURT OF MAN'S NATURE, within his heart. It is a sort of petty sessions, not the Great Judgment. Conscience sits within us, as judges sometimes sit in chambers, hearing cases, as they say, *in camera*. If we are righteously acquitted in this first court, then the matter is ended, and we have confidence toward God, but if our heart condemn us, if in this preliminary trial we are condemned, it is an evil omen, for the probability is that the great all-knowing Judge will more than confirm the sentence. Condemnation by our own conscience is an ill sign, though even yet there is a court of appeal. If our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

I will now speak upon this trial under the heads of certain observations.

This trial is studiously avoided by very many. Many professors shun anything like a testing of their profession, any trying of their religion by examination. Multitudes of persons seldom think; they live the life of butterflies, flitting from flower to flower with careless wing; there is no real purpose in their lives. Many others think, and think deeply, but not about their souls or their God. They consider the matter of their relationship to their Creator to be a very secondary matter, which can be taken up in the last few minutes of their lives, when the death sweat is on their brow and they are quite incapable of proper judgment. They leave, I say, the best things to the worst moments, and think that they are wise in so doing. This is a grave folly and ought not to rule a man in his senses. Certain Christian professors, too, who should know better, seldom examine themselves as to whether they are in the faith. They take it for granted that all is well with them. They made a profession a great many years ago, they have been decent sort of people ever since, in fact, they have been respected among their fellow Christians, possibly they have even taken office in the church. Are they to question their foundation? Is it necessary that they should put themselves into the scales and be weighed again? It is a very ominous sign for a man when he is afraid of discussing his spiritual state in the chamber of his own heart. I am persuaded that many Christians are the subjects of doubts and fears about their own condition, simply because they have never thought the matter out. It is a great deal better to sift an affair to the bottom than it is to be always tormented by suspicion. If I must go to sea, and I suspect the soundness of the vessel, I shall demand that the ship be surveyed, and that I know whether it is a rotten old coffin, or whether it is a good substantial ship. I do not think it is a healthy state of things for man to be always singing—

"Tis a point I long to know."

Brothers and sisters, you ought to know whether you love the Lord or not. Your love must be very cold and feeble if it is a matter of question. Warmth of love proves its own existence in many ways. Friend, you should be anxious to the last degree to take stock of your spiritual estate. Your desire should be to know the very worst of your case. If your condition should turn out to be horribly bad, you had better know it; certainly your knowing it will not make it any worse. If your case should turn out to be all right, then you will have the confidence that comes of this knowledge—the confidence of which our text speaks. If our hearts, after due, deliberate, and impartial trial, condemn us not, then we have confidence toward God, and that confidence sweetens life. He that gets confidence through honest searching of heart shall be filled with delight and strength. But, I repeat it sadly, many avoid the inward trial of the heart, they will not bring their case into the spiritual court, even though the judgement seat is set up in the privacy of their own inward nature. Thus they walk on blindfolded to the brink of the precipice. God grant the bandage may be taken off before they have taken the final and fatal step.

But secondly, let us note that *genuine Christians very much frequent this court of conscience*. They long to have their condition put to a thorough test, lest they be deceived. I have known some Christians even keep too much in this court; they so often test themselves that it looks as if they would spend their lives in making trials of their state. Looking within can be easily overdone, we ought to have higher work than that of continually laying the foundation of repentance from dead works. When a ship first leaves the stocks it is well for it to go on a trial trip, but to have a ship always being tried would be very absurd, it is time that it took voyages in real earnest, and was registered in the merchant service, there will then be trial enough in the actual execution of service. Some Christians, by a continual introspection, are always raising the point, "Am I a Christian?" Brother, be a Christian. "Am I a child of God?"

Brother, be a child of God, and enjoy it, and do not spend a lifetime in searching for the family register. However, it is certain that the genuine Christian is not averse to self-examination, nor to any form of test through which he can be put. If you are right with God your prayer will be, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. O my God, I do not wish to be deluded with 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace! I do not want to deceive myself, or to be lulled into soft slumbers upon the dainty bed of presumption. No, let me be emptied from vessel to vessel rather than be suffered to settle upon my lees. Let me be searched with candles rather than harbor sin within me. Let me even be thrust into the fire rather than remain base metal, the counterfeit of the King's money." Make sure work for eternity. Be certain, by the witness of the Holy Spirit within you, that you are indeed the children of God. The spirit of the true man answers to this, he is always willing to set in order the court of conscience, and make solemn trial of his heart and life.

In this court, dear friends, *the question to be decided is a very weighty one*. What is that question, do you think? I do not think it is the question, "Am I perfect?" because we can solve that without holding a formal court. The question is not, "Am I absolutely free from sin?" for, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The question is this, "Am I sincere in the truth? Is my religion true, and am I true in my profession of it?" Next, "Does love rule in my nature?" All this chapter deals with love, and teaches us that the possession of love is the supreme test of our state. Note the fourteenth verse, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loves not his brother abides in death." The inquiry is—"Do I love God? Do I love my brother also? Is my spirit that of love, for, if not, I am not a child of God." Then the next question is, "Do I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?" In the verse which succeeds my text, this is put as a great test, that, we believe in Jesus Christ. Faith is the main question for conscience to decide, together with the following one, "Do I also keep His Commandments? Do I obey God? Do I seek to be holy as Jesus is holy? Or am I living in known sin, and tolerating that in myself which does not and cannot please God?" The verse that follows my text puts it, "We keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight," and the question is, "Do we not only try to keep the commandments, but do we do so because it is pleasing to God? Is my master motive to please God? Do I want to be an Enoch, who had this testimony, that he pleased God? Do I keep His commandments, and labor to please Him?" These are the questions to be tried in the court of conscience, and never was there a weightier issue. On this, our eternal state depends. It is not your estate that is now at stake; it is not your health that is now in question, it is your living unto God, your being now a child of God, and so being prepared to face the mysterious solemnities of eternity. O sirs, do not hesitate to take these matters into the court of conscience. If you have avoided that court before, attend it now, and give your soul a solemn hearing!

This court is guided by a mass of evidence. That evidence has not to be sought for, it is there already. If the case were to be, "Do my fellow men think me a child of God, do they regard me as being a believer in whom faith works by love?" that would be a difficult question, because we would have to subpoena so many to give their opinion of our private and public life. But in this case we have nothing to do with outsiders; the conscience is the witness as well as the judge and jury. The whole case is carried on within. We cannot object to the witnesses, for they are our own heart and conscience. We must believe what these say. Nor can we object to the judgement, since our own conscience is judge, and we are not at all likely to be unjust towards ourselves. We are so partial, and there is so much of flattering deceit and self-love about us, that we could not wish to be tried by a more favoring judge than our own conscience. We cannot decline the jurisdiction under any pretence of prejudice against us. And oh, what a mass of evidence our heart can furnish; evidence even more conclusive than that of outward actions! Memory rises up and says, "I remember all you have done since your profession of conversion—your shortcomings and breaches of the covenant." The will confesses to offenses which never ripened into acts for lack of opportunity. The passions admit outbreaks which were concealed from human observation. The imagination is made to bear testimony, and what a sinful power that imagination is, and how difficult it is to govern it, its tale is sad to hear. Our tempers confess to evil anger, our lusts to evil longings, and our hearts to evil covetousness, pride, and rebellion. Hopeful witness there is also of sin conquered, habits broken, and desires repressed, all this is honestly taken in evidence and duly weighed. Everything within us will have to tell whether it has been renewed or not, whether it has been changed from darkness to

light, and come from under the power of sin and Satan into the power of Christ. Each power can give evidence of grace or token of unregeneracy, and according to the weight of evidence the verdict must go. The heart possesses a mass of evidence utterly unknown anywhere else, for the heart knows its own sinfulness as it knows its own bitterness, and the man's heart can reveal secrets to itself which it dare not whisper into the ear of the kindest friend. The trial cannot fail from lack of evidence bearing upon the point.

While the trial is going on, *the deliberation causes great suspense*. As long as I have to ask my heart, "Heart, do you condemn me, or do you acquit me?" I stand trembling. You may have seen a picture entitled, "Waiting for the Verdict." The artist has put into the countenances of the waiters every form of unrest, for the suspense is terrible. Blessed be God, we are not called upon to wait long for the verdict of conscience. We ought never to let the question remain in suspense at all, we should settle it, and settle it in the light of God, and then walk in the light as God is in the light. I confess I cannot understand the comfort which I see in some people's faces when they own that they do not know whether they are the people of God or not. If you are not saved, or are not sure of it, how dare you rest? Are you in danger of eternal wrath? Then give no sleep to your eyes till you know that you have escaped so great a peril. It looks to me as if your doubt could not be real if it does not work in your heart great misery and agony of spirit. A person in doubt about his salvation, and unable to rest, I can perfectly well understand, but a person in doubt in any measure about his reconciliation to God, and yet happy, is a mystery. How can the grace of God be in a heart which is not sure of pardon and yet is content? It is an exceedingly painful thing to have this trial going on in the soul and to be waiting for the verdict.

One thing I will observe, however, before I leave this matter, *it is not the supreme court*. If it should so happen that the verdict of the court should be against you, if your heart condemns you, remember the verdict is not final; there is still a higher court. I love the way in which Peter put it once. He had denied his Master, denied Him repeatedly with oaths, but he had bitterly repented, and when his Lord said to him, "Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?" his heart did not condemn him upon the question of loving his Master, but his heart did condemn him sorely for having denied his Lord, so, after pleading, "Lord, I do love You," he takes his case into the higher court, and says, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." In moments of soul conflict it will be wise for you to carry this question beyond yourself up to the Omniscient One. The translation of the Revised Version, though I do not like it, has a bearing on this point, and so I quote it, "Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, for if our heart condemns us, because God is greater than our heart, and knows all things."

I pray you all to recollect this that the trial by your conscience is not, after all, the ultimate and the decisive one, because your conscience may go to sleep, or make a mistake in your favor, or your conscience may become morbid, and may not take under its consideration all the facts of the case, and so may go against you. Since there may be an error of judgment you should make your appeal to the Most High, saying, "Search me, O God." Above all, if your conscience should now condemn you, still remember that there remains the free, full gospel even for the chief of sinners. If you stand before God condemned in heart this morning, throw yourself upon your face with that sense of condemnation upon you, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Whichever verdict comes from an enlightened conscience, it will be exceedingly serviceable to you if you have regard to it. If it condemns you not, then have confidence toward God, and if it condemns you, the condemnation may drive you at once to flee for refuge to the hope that is set before the guilty in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit thus bless you!

II. Allow me, secondly, to speak to you upon a pleasing theme, namely, THE ACQUITTAL ISSUED FROM THIS COURT, "If our heart condemn us not." Observe that a man may get an acquittal from the court of conscience, for *the question laid before the heart can be settled*. It can be ascertained whether I sincerely believe in Jesus Christ, it can be ascertained whether I sincerely love God and love His people, it can be ascertained whether my heart is obedient to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are not hazy, mysterious problems, which can never be solved. The case may be made clear one way or the other. The court has no difficulty before it beyond its faculty; it is quite competent to decide the question in the light of Scripture by the help of God.

These questions, however, must be debated with great discernment. Suppose a person to be greatly tempted, to be tempted morning, noon, and night with foul temptations, yet conscience must not say, "This person is no child of God, because he is tempted." There is no sin in being tempted, since our Lord Jesus was tempted of the devil, and yet in Him was no sin. Abundance, yes, superabundance of temptation is no proof against the sincerity of our faith in our God, on the contrary, it may sometimes happen that the more we are tempted the more true is it that there is something in us to tempt, some good thing which Satan seeks to destroy.

Again, *the verdict of the heart must be given with discrimination*, or otherwise we may judge according to outward circumstances, and so judge amiss. It will never do to say, "I am greatly afflicted in estate, in family, or in depression of spirits, and therefore I cannot be a child of God." What! Are not God's children chastened? What son is there whom the Father chastens not? Some of the best children of God have been the most afflicted, yes, and let me say it pointedly, some of the purest Christians that have ever lived have had the most sickness to bear, and by that means they have been made more meet for heaven, even as the sycamore fig by being bruised becomes ripe. When, therefore, it is suggested that you are not a child of God because you are afflicted, the idea is not to be tolerated, since we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

Neither, again, do our imperfections or infirmities decide against us. An enlightened conscience says, "It is true this man has sinned, but it was not of intent, but by inadvertence or surprise. His soul hates the sin into which he fell. He deeply repents of his offense." The occurrence of sin in the life does not prove a man to be out of grace. The prevalence of sin, the toleration of sin, the love of sin, the willful continuance in sin, would do so, but the fact of imperfection, if wept over and repented of, is not condemnatory evidence. The fact, that my child is little and feeble, is no proof that he is not my son. The boy may be like his father, and yet be only a tiny baby. Weakness and even faultiness may be confessed, and yet we may have confidence towards God. So the verdict has to be given with great discrimination.

And *the verdict has to be given, mark you, upon gospel principles.* The question before the court of conscience is not, "Have I perfectly kept the law?" The answer to that is simple enough, "There is not a just man upon earth that does good, and sins not;" "By the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified." The question is, "Am I a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I resting in Him for salvation, and do I prove the truth of that faith by loving God, loving the brethren, and by doing those things which are pleasing to God, and avoiding those things which are displeasing to Him?" "The question is not concerning merit, but concerning grace and the fruit of grace. Salvation is of grace and of grace alone, therefore my inquiry should be—"Am I partaker of that grace? Unworthy though I am, am I washed in the blood of Jesus, am I covered with His righteousness; am I accepted in the Beloved?" That is the question, and if ever you get to discussing it upon legal principles you will go wrong. We are not tried in the court of the heart according to the old covenant, but according to the new covenant, another book is opened, which is the book of life.

Permit me to say, here, that *this question in the court of the heart must never be settled by our feelings.* If the heart is at all right in its judgments it will never say, "I am a child of God because I am so happy." Nor will it exclaim, on the other hand, "I cannot be a child of God because I am so sad." Holy feelings may be brought in as evidence, but they are hard to estimate. Feelings are variable as the wind; feelings depend so much upon the body and outward surroundings, so much even upon the condition of the atmosphere. I protest that as to feelings I go up and down very much according to the barometer. Therefore I make small account of my feelings. If I am very glad I say to myself, "Keep steady. Be not intoxicated with joy." If I find my spirits sink, I cry, "Come, heart, do not play the fool, you have nothing to be down about, rejoice in God always, and have no confidence in the flesh." Deal thus with yourselves, for the question in hand is not, "Am I happy?" but, "Am I a sincere believer, does my faith prove its sincerity by the effect which it produces upon my life?" Sinners can rejoice as well as saints, and saints can mourn as well as sinners, the point is not what we feel, but what we believe and do.

This question of our state ought to be settled speedily. As I have already said to you, it must not be allowed to hang about. We know "the law's delays," but we must not allow any delay in this court. No, we must press for summary justice. Does my heart condemn me, or does not my heart condemn me? Get a clear and plain answer at once to this issue. If your heart condemns any of you here this morning, if you say, "Yes, I am a member of the church but I ought not to be, I do not live as I should;" if you are

not believers in Christ, if you feel that you have no love to the brethren, then take the verdict, and go humbly to God and ask Him to renew your hearts. The door of free grace is still open to you. But, on the other hand, if your conscience says, “Yes, with all my imperfections, with all my infirmities, I do love God with all my heart, I do trust in Christ, for I have nothing else to trust to, I do lean my whole weight upon His finished work, I hang on Christ as a vessel hangs on the nail, I have no dependence anywhere else. I know there is a change in me; I know that the things I once loved I now hate, and the things I once hated I now love; I desire perfect holiness in the fear of God,” then you are in the condition of which the apostle says, “If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”

Let us consider that happy state at some length, and then close our discourse. May you all have the full enjoyment of holy boldness before God through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

III. Let us consider THE CONSEQUENCE OF THIS ACQUITTAL. Here is the man who has had his acquittal in the court of conscience. Your conscience has said, “He is a sincere man, he is a believing man, he is quickened with the life of God, he is an obedient and God-fearing man,” and now you have confidence toward God, or at least you have a right to such confidence.

What does that confidence or boldness mean? There is the confidence of *truthfulness*. When you kneel down to pray, you know that you are praying, and not mocking God; when you sing, you are making melody in your heart; when you preach, you are preaching that which your soul believes. If I spoke to you today about things which I was not quite sure of, it would be wretched work, but I usually feel a great deal of enjoyment when I am preaching, because to me the things which I teach are my comfort and life. If *you* do not enjoy the sermon, I do. Sometimes I say to myself, “These doctrines are exceedingly sweet, I feed upon them myself, and therefore the people ought to be fed, and if they are not it is their own fault.” A cook may not even get a taste of the roast, but it is not often so with me. Because I believe for myself I feel a confidence in preaching to you. Confidence towards God is a truthfulness of spirit which prevents our being ashamed in what we do towards Him. Can you say, “Whatever I do, I do it honestly. Though I am not what I wish to be in all things, yet that which I profess before God is true”? Then you have confidence. “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” I do not put spectacles over blind eyes, and make people believe that I can see, but I really see. I know I do. I know I trust, I know I love God, and I know I love holiness! This deep sincerity breeds in a man a blessed indifference to the judgments of men. Having a conscience void of offense, he feels a holy freedom as to the formalities of pretence. Look at the hypocrite; he is afraid of being found out. He has to do everything most primly and demurely, lest he should be suspected. If you paint your face, you must take care neither to cry nor laugh, lest you crack the enamel. If you wear shoddy clothing, you must not run or jump, for your garments might split. Accidents must be guarded against when you deal with shams. A hypocrite will censure you very severely for having smiled just now, and he will condemn me outright for being so wicked as to make you smile on such a Sunday. Poor soul, he must keep up his propriety, for it is all he has. In these times of bad trade many who are ready to fail are afraid to lower their expenditure for fear their poverty should be suspected, and so they keep up a good appearance to stave off bankruptcy as long as they may. If they were solvent they would not be so fearful. If your conscience condemns you not, then you enjoy a blessed ease of spirit, because the truth is in you.

The next kind of confidence is confidence towards God as to one’s *acceptance* with Him. If my heart says, “Yes, you do believe,” then I know from God’s word that I have eternal life. The Word says, “He that believes on Me has everlasting life.” Conscience says, “Yes, you have faith,” and the heart concludes, there is therefore now no condemnation. Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Believe me, the sweetest stream that ever waters this desert world is the river of confident acceptance in the Beloved. When you know this, your life is gilded with the sunlight of the coming glory, and your heart rejoices exceedingly.

This produces and perhaps it is that which the apostle most intended, a *boldness of converse*. The man, who knows that he is truthful, and that God has accepted him, then speaks freely with God. He feels a holy awe of God, and never wishes to lose it, but yet he exercises a sacred boldness towards Him. Is it not wonderful to see how Abraham talked with God? He went up to the place where God spoke with Him, and when God told Him that He was about to destroy Sodom, how exquisitely, and yet how boldly did Abraham put it—“Will You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? That be far from You.” What! Does Abraham expostulate with God? Does Abraham dream that God will do an unjust

thing? Oh, no, but he is bold, and that is the most forcible plea which he can think of, and so he urges it again and again with God. How he pushes his case—"I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: will You destroy all the city for lack of five?" It is wonderful pleading, and it illustrates the words "confidence toward God." Look at Job, again. There was a man whose heart did not condemn him, for he could say, "Lord, You know I am not wicked." He speaks with God very boldly, and he says, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him: I would come even to His seat, I would order my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Though the terrors of God might make Him afraid, yet, secure in the quiet of his conscience, he has confidence towards God. Not only confidence *in* God, mark you, but *toward* God, so as to speak with God as a man speaks with his friend. Do you understand this? I know you do not if you have any doubt as to your being a child of God. Suspicion makes you a coward, for when your heart does not condemn you, and you know that you are right before the Lord, then, you feel liberty of converse.

This leads to great *confidence in prayer*. Look at the context. "We have confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." If you want power in prayer you must have purity in life. There is no promise in the Bible made to every one of you that whatsoever you ask God will give you, it is made to persons of a certain character, the unlimited promise is to the man of God who is so sanctified that he will not ask, and does not think of asking, anything that is not in accordance with God's will. Remember this passage—"Delight yourself also in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart." The desire of the man who delights in God is always in accordance with the mind of God, therefore he is the man that can get whatsoever he wills. When you do all things that please God, and your life is sanctified and holy, then it is that you abide in His love. Has not Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you"? Unsanctified desires will be graciously refused, but the will of the sincerely obedient man is conformed to the will of God, and therefore it shall be fulfilled. "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He hears us."

Our text means also that such a man shall have confidence towards God, *in all service for God*. Look at the man of God who has confidence towards God, as to *the perils encountered* in faithfully following His Lord. Take Daniel for instance. Daniel does not question about what he has to do when the decree is signed that whosoever shall pray shall be cast into the den of lions, he throws open his window as he was accustomed to do, he looks towards Jerusalem, and bows his knee as he had done before, and he prays to God as if there were no edict. His confidence toward God is that he is safe in the path of duty. He does not count the cost, neither did the three holy children when the fiery furnace was before them, but they said, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto you O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up." Is not that a blessed confidence towards God which a man obtains when his heart does not condemn him? If Daniel had said, "I shall pray down in the cellar, or with the blinds drawn," he would have lost all confidence towards God, and would not have been the man he was. If the three children had said, "We will bow the knee, but we will make in our minds a secret protest, we will not really worship the idol, but we will worship God while we bow before the image," they would not have had confidence in God. Alas, what foolish tricks men play with what they call their consciences nowadays. This wonderful nineteenth century is altogether incomprehensible to a simple, honest man. Consciences used to work up and down, yes or no, but now they have an eccentric action, altogether indescribable. A man serves the devil nowadays, and gets the devil's pay, and all the while talks of serving God. May you have a conscience void of offense, straight and clear in everything, and so have confidence towards God.

Moreover, we have this confidence towards God in the way of service, so that we are sure of *receiving all necessary help*. God will help the true man, and if he comes to a pinch, and cannot get on by himself, he may boldly summon others of his Master's servants to his aid. Look at Joshua fighting with the Amalekites. The day is not long enough, and therefore, he lays his command upon the sun, and says to it, "Sun, stand still upon Gibeon, and you, moon, in the valley of Ajalon"! He had need of longer daylight, and he dared the sun and moon to move an inch till the pursuit of his foes was over. Thus may a

servant of God challenge help from earth and heaven, and impress all forces into the service of his Lord. An officer, if he finds himself in straits, impresses anybody that passes by, saying, “In the King’s name, help me.” Even so, if you do your Lord’s bidding, and if conscience condemns you not, you may impress into the service of the great King every angel in heaven, and every force of nature, as need requires.

I wish I had time to tell you all that confidence towards God means. It means rest, *perfect rest*. Look at your Lord when the tempest was on. Loud roaring, the billows come near to overwhelming the ship, but He is asleep. Nobody but He could dare to slumber, because nobody else had such confidence in God. He knew the vessel was safe, why should He worry? True, He was Lord High Admiral of the seas, and had responsibility not only for His own flagship, but for the whole fleet of little ships that sailed with Him that day, but He did not give way to sleeplessness because of that, He cast Himself on God, and fell asleep. It was the best thing to do. You and I may do the same, we need not be frightened or worried, or troubled, but just trust in the Lord and do good, so shall we dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed. This is confidence towards God.

This confidence often mounts up into *joy*, till the Christian man overflows with delight in God; he cannot contain his happiness. As Solomon says, he eats his bread with joy, for God has accepted his works. He lives with the wife of his youth in full contentment, and his children are a blessing to him. He goes to his toil rejoicing to serve God in his calling, and he comes home at night to repose himself in the care of his God and Father. All is well, and he knows it.

Blessed man, that has confidence in God. Such a man goes up to his last bed when the message comes that the spirit must return to God who gave it, he goes *to die* without alarm, his conscience does not condemn him, and therefore he lays himself down in patience, and waits the signal to be with God. Meanwhile the light of heaven steals over his face, and they that come to cheer and comfort him hear strange words, like notes of the birds of Paradise, dropping from his lips. They see that he is in pain, but they also mark that he is baptized in enjoyment. They think that he is dying, but he testifies that he is entering into life. The pearly gate is open before him; the glitter of the golden street is meeting his failing eyes. Hear him sing, as best as his failing breath permits—

*“And when you see my eye-strings break,
How sweet my minutes roll;
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
But glory in my soul.”*

Now, he is gone, gone into the land of spirits. He stands before his God, and he does not tremble. He has that eagle-eye which can bear the light of the eternal sun. His heart condemns him not, and he has confidence towards God. Amidst the supernal splendors he cries, “My Father.” Angels are crying, “Lord and God,” but *he* says, “My Father,” and those loyal servants make room for a royal child. The shining ones escort the happy spirit to the blessed Father’s feet. There we leave him. “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” God bless you. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 JOHN 3.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—100 (VERSION 1), 715, 708.**

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